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ABSTRACT

Guidelines are presented for the development of a system for the appraisal of the performance of community college administrators. The importance of such a system to the college's overall success is discussed first, followed by descriptions of seven common evaluation procedures: (1) unstructured essays by supervisors or subordinates describing the administrator's accomplishments; (2) unstructured documentation by the administrator of his/her own activities, using information sources such as daily logs; (3) structured narratives constructed around short-answer questions; (4) structured documentation by the administrator verifying progress on a set of predetermined goals; (5) rating scales; (6) critical incident appraisals, in which evaluators record behavior as it occurs; and (7) appraisal through goal achievement. After enumerations of the advantages and purposes of an appraisal system, three evaluation pitfalls are discussed: the evaluator's subjective judgements, incompatibility of ratings among departments, and vague evaluation criteria. Prerequisites for successful evaluations are then detailed and a list is presented of the characteristics of competent evaluators. Finally, the structure and content of the appraisal interview are examined. Questions that should be asked during this interview are identified, and interviewing techniques are recommended for the evaluator. (JP)

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Robert G. Lahti

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Four major functions of management are fundamental to the successful development and maintenance of a community college: defining its purpose; molding its character; determining what needs to be accomplished; and mobilizing resources to accomplish these needs. How do we know when these functions are being performed adequately or expertly? First by checking that the above-mentioned four functions of management are understood. The next and most important activity is to appraise the effectiveness and the performance of the management team charged with the success of the community college. At least two other human forces are at play: a sound, well-functioning board of policy makers and a motivated work force. In these last two cases the management team or leader has influence or direct responsibilities in effecting the proper activity of the labor force and the governing board. However, this *Junior College Resource Review* concentrates directly on performance appraisal.

Whether in a public or private community college, effecting a performance appraisal system is significant to its success. Because of unsophisticated or improper application of performance appraisal systems, too many have yielded unsatisfactory or disappointing results. Some critics have suggested that performance appraisals be abandoned; instead they should be improved. Formal evaluative systems are not worthless, nor are they panaceas, as many organizational managers might wish. By improving the probability that good performance will be recognized and rewarded and poor performance corrected, a soundly conceived managerial appraisal system can contribute to organizational morale and improved performance.

How might a managerial practitioner limit some of the inherent biases and errors that creep into crudely constituted performance appraisal systems. Following are a few principles.

## SEVEN MAJOR TYPES OF APPRAISAL SYSTEMS

**The Unstructured Narration or Essay Appraisal**

This approach is the most common. In its simplest form, this technique asks the evaluator (sometimes the administrator himself) to write a paragraph or more covering the administrator's activities or accomplishments over a specific period of time. The criteria for evaluation are most often determined by the evaluator, though they are usually responsive to supervisory expectation.

Supplemental unstructured narrations may be requested from the supervisor, a subordinate, or other parties knowledgeable about the administrator's activities. In screening applicants and selecting employees, particularly for professional or managerial positions, unstructured narrations from former employers or associates are commonly used and carry varying degrees of weight.

**Unstructured Documentation**

The unstructured documentation process requests an administrator to document his or her activities or achievements by letters of recommendation, ratings of participants, daily logs, interview data, etc. Unstructured documentation is primarily the result of a self-directed evaluation.

**Structured Narration**

Structured narration involves the use of short-answer questionnaires requiring an evaluator to answer a series of questions related to administrative performance; for example, "In what areas does this administrator possess the greatest strength?"; or "In what areas does this administrator need greatest improvement?"; or "Discuss this administrator's initiative and creativity." One or more evaluators may be involved in the structured narration evaluation.

**Structured Documentation**

While structured documentation has been used for several years in the creative and performing arts, it has been adapted recently to administrative appraisal in higher education. This methodology requires the supervisor and administrator to agree upon a set of categories appropriate to the administrator's work which can be evaluated. Typical categories related to job functions, skill areas, or performance objectives. The administrator assumes primary responsibility for documenting success in each of these areas. On occasions, other individuals such as subordinates, peers, instructional staff, and other experts help establish the categories.

**Rating Scales**

Rating scales are frequently utilized by colleges and universities. In most cases, these scales are used by supervisors or subordinates to assess individual performance. Typical subjects found on rating scales are: knowledge capacity, dependability, adaptability, interpersonal relationships, resourcefulness, commitment to professional growth, and activities. Quality of results may sometimes be addressed. Some scales attempt to assess the quality of relationships between the administrator and his or her subordinates.

**The Critical Incident Appraisal or "The Black Book"**

The critical incident approach suggests that a supervisor keep a record (the little black book) on each employee and record actual incidents of positive or negative behavior. In some community colleges where a system is lacking, this approach is utilized by individual supervisors with or without the knowledge of the subordinate.

Drawbacks to this approach are that documentation of this type can require unusual time, feedback is often delayed until it

is too late to discuss, and the supervisor most often sets standards without the subordinate agreeing to or understanding the standards against which he is being judged.

**Goal Setting — Goal Achievement**

Management through goal setting, or appraisal through goal achievement, is a comprehensive system for optimum personnel management. An effective goal-oriented evaluation program includes agreement between supervisor and subordinate on the subunit's program mission, the employee's job description, and operational goals. The supervisor and subordinate commit themselves to the attainment of mutual goals. Periodic reviews throughout the year for assessment, coaching, and development are essential to the appraisal process. A summary appraisal interview is held at the end of each work year.

## ADVANTAGES OF THE APPRAISAL PROGRAM

The advantages that should accrue to a community college willing to spend the time and effort necessary to construct a sound program are many. An appraisal program provides criteria for measuring performance of each employee, assists a supervisor in setting standards and apportioning work in relation to department or organizational goals, gives a supervisor an opportunity to evaluate the effects of staff development and coaching, and provides information on how well a department may be operating by giving an overall review of performance in relation to direct observation.

Results are increased individual and collective work achievement and should result in better employee and supervisory morale. Unsatisfactory performance is given an opportunity to improve, thus demonstrating the organization's interest in employee development. These factors should facilitate long-range personnel planning and management-succession decisions.

These advantages become realities when there is an organizational commitment to the most common purposes ascribed to an effective appraisal system:

- to provide formal opportunity for an employee to discuss performance, achievements, and difficulties
- to set and measure performance standards
- to improve efficiency of the individual and the total work group
- to identify serious but correctable deficiencies
- to identify individual and group training needs
- to be aware of employees who should receive increments as well as those whose performance is slipping
- to recommend pay increases, promotions, transfer, or dismissals according to specified standards
- to give feedback to employees on how they are getting along and how their work is regarded
- to motivate individuals to do a better job
- to recognize achievements

## PERFORMANCE EVALUATION PITFALLS

Another aspect in creating an effective appraisal system is awareness of the problems that may be encountered in evaluation processes. Some of the major pitfalls assessed by experts are that no matter how well defined appraisal parameters are or how well quantified individual goals are, judgments on performance still remain too subjective. Personal values and biases often replace organizational standards. Unprepared appraisals provide inadequate information about the subtleties of managerial performance; some judgments, therefore, are viewed as arbitrary.

Ratings by individuals in different departments or units in the same organization may not be comparable. What is viewed as excellent work in one department may be only acceptable in another. Performance appraisals may demand too much time from supervisors because they require at least periodic observation of performance. When the span of control is too broad, supervisors may not have adequate firsthand knowledge of subordinates' activities. Sometimes supervisors may resist the use of ratings because they feel unable to make fair judgments, because they think the system is deficient, or because supervisors may be unwilling to confront less effective subordinates with realistic ratings. Supervisors may fail to give feedback to subordinates often enough, thus delaying effective reinforcement.

Because supervisors' criteria for judgments are not clear, individuals being appraised do not know what kind of performance is expected. Performance appraisals, including negative feedback from unskilled supervisors, can demoralize employees who do not have a high degree of self-esteem. Ratings based on results without consideration of behavior may result in competent employees being unfairly graded. Administrators may expect appraisal techniques alone to solve performance problems and may not give adequate attention to sound selection, appropriate placement, and staff development programs. Performance appraisals may interfere with the developmental responsibilities that a supervisor has for his or her subordinates. The appraisal interview too often stresses the role of judge rather than the roles of teacher and coach.

## PERFORMANCE EVALUATION SUCCESS

Finally, the managerial practitioner should be aware of the principles on which a successful evaluation system is based. The program measures the right things: achievement of agreed-upon goals; performance as a manager — planning, organizing, implementing, evaluating. "Measure the work, not the worker." The program is a living system — contemporary and operational and as objective as possible with agreed-upon standards that are verifiable, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The program should be constructive, be acceptable to the personnel involved, and lead to growth. Coaching and development are basic to the system. The program should provide a basis for modifying behavior to improve performance, motivate professional employees by providing feedback, and provide a research and referential basis for personnel decisions.

In addition to the principles of a well-founded appraisal system, there are three basic building blocks: the job description, a well-conceived goal-setting strategy, and a measurement of managerial characteristics or behavior. Once the acceptance, involvement, and development of a system have been established by the managerial constituents of organization, it is time for orientation to the system and the development of good evaluators. Since orientation to the system is directly related to the organizational mode chosen, the specifics of orientation cannot be discussed here; however, characteristics of good evaluators can. He or she:

- is sincerely interested in the process of evaluation
- demonstrates a willingness to prepare and spend the necessary time
- does not impose bias upon subordinates, but exhibits a well-adjusted personality
- demonstrates sympathy and understanding
- is flexible and objective
- is specific, whether with compliments or constructive criticism
- acknowledges credit where it it due
- demonstrates a willingness to recognize his or her own limitations: does not play judge, God, or policeman, but acts as an interested coach
- listens

- encourages employees to speak freely and welcomes objections or exceptions

## THE APPRAISAL INTERVIEW

The most delicate and significant part of a successful performance appraisal system rests in preparing and conducting the appraisal interview. This interview is a managerial process that should take place more than once a year, and preferably one to four times a year — independent of salary considerations — to assess the progress and productivity of each manager. It is a review of a manager's job performance, defined by the job description, and of the progress in carrying out the goals and objectives agreed upon by the manager and supervisor at the beginning of a specified period. Anxiety-producing aspects of the appraisal experience should be minimized since both participants have agreed previously to the terms of the review. The appraisal process should reinforce the principles of participative management, coaching and development, and the maintenance of the best professional relationships.

Basic to a successful appraisal interview are the existence of good job descriptions throughout the institution, a degree of sophistication in goal-setting arising from the job descriptions, the supervisor's awareness of the major elements of the manager's job, and at least 30 to 45 minutes spent by the supervisor in interview preparation. During the preparation period, the supervisor develops a plan for the interview, reviews past performance and interview data, and refreshes his memory concerning the goals and objectives to be discussed. A poorly prepared supervisor is certain to produce anxieties during the interview. Goals not met or off schedule should be adjusted, or a plan should be devised to put them back on schedule.

Most significant to the interview is the supervisor's ability to create a nonthreatening atmosphere and a respectful exchange of information. During the interview, as subtly as possible near the end, the supervisor should provide the opportunity for response to questions. The supervisor's listening attentively and quietly affects the quality and future relationship between the two members of the organizational team. Fundamental, obligatory questions the supervisor should ask include:

- Are your duties and responsibilities adequately defined?
- Is your work sufficient and challenging?
- Are your work and ability appreciated?
- Do you get the support you need?
- Are you informed and consulted when you should be?
- Do you have access to your supervisor to talk things over freely?
- Do you have the authority and opportunity to exercise initiative?
- Are your opportunities for advancement and training adequate?
- How could your supervisor or others help your performance?
- What kind of place is this to work?
- Are there issues you would like to discuss about your job?

The appraisal interviewer should build on the attributes of a good evaluator by adding the following:

- Prepare adequately for the interview.
- Put the subordinate at ease.
- Underscore the purpose of the interview.
- In going over the evaluation, keep in mind you are discussing job performance and not the individual.
- Keep in mind that some of a subordinate's shortcomings may have resulted from a supervisor's inability to guide, instruct, communicate or motivate clearly.
- Acknowledge or give credit where credit is due.
- Encourage the subordinate to explain obstacles to satisfactory or improved job performance.
- Develop a summary set of standard questions which may be posed to the evaluatee for his or her response to the supervisor at or near the end of the interview.

## CONCLUSION

When a formal managerial appraisal becomes a high priority, a community college should assess that a well-defined institutional mission is written, understood and agreed upon by all employees of the organization. An eclectic and contemporary style of managerial leadership and philosophy is understood and practiced by the organization's managers in a participative-situational leadership style. A sound wage and salary administration program is in existence and adhered to. A soundly conceived system of goal-oriented management is understood and practiced by management, and the objectives and elements of a performance appraisal system are articulated and agreed upon by the organization's managers. An administrative committee, under the guidance or consultation of a personnel specialist, facilitates the implementation process, beginning with a substantial orientation program is offered to each individual involved in the program. Commitment to a periodic follow-up and evaluation process is necessary to maintain successful performance evaluation.

The development of valid appraisal systems for organizational managers in both the public and private sectors has not kept pace with the giant strides of the managerial revolution. Few gurus of management would deny that sound appraisal is a key to managerial development; and the quality of managing to the success or failure of a community college.

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